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ABSTRACT

The need to develop educational programs in universities that respond to the current need for liberally educated technical-professionals and employable liberal studies majors is considered. It is contended that few faculty are currently skilled to offer, and that no curriculum in higher education currently demands, sufficient and appropriate general education courses that fit our societal need for liberally educated technical-professionals. Implementing this proposal will require both professional development efforts by faculty and curricular restructuring in academic requirements. The following background considerations to the proposal are discussed: (1) faculty and their understanding of their proper professional role, (2) certain changes in our social system that bring to question current curricula, and (3) expectations of students concerning a university education. (SW)

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Teaching-Learning Issues

LIBERAL AND TECHNICAL-PROFESSIONAL STUDIES: A SOCIETAL PERSPECTIVE ON GENERAL EDUCATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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This number of TEACHING-LEARNING ISSUES has been prepared by Charles H. Reynolds, professor of Religious Studies.

You can not teach a man anything;
you can only help him to find it
within himself.

Galileo

Learning Research Center
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Professions share two characteristics that are often in tension. On the one hand, professions have an altruistic concern to serve the common interests of the inclusive society; on the other, they tend to be defensive about their turfs and protective against any encroachments on their activities by outsiders.

A societal perspective on general education focuses this tension that we professional academicians share with other professions. We are committed to serve the common interests of the inclusive society, but we are highly protective and defensive about our own turf—we, too, refer to the public interests to mask our defensive stances. Some of us argue that our society needs men and women who can think clearly and critically, communicate well both orally and in writing, bring a world-historical perspective to bear on contemporary issues, make reasoned judgments, and recognize and appreciate the fine arts; i.e., our society needs liberally educated men and women! Now it is, of course, simply a coincidence that those of us who make this case are professionally committed to liberal education.

Others of us argue, with equal passion and equally in keeping with our professional commitments, that our society really needs competently trained men and women to fill the technical-professional positions in the service sector of our society; i.e., professionally educated men and women with particular career or work skills. It is worth observing how few professional academicians maintain that our society needs both liberally educated and skilled technical-professional workers.

My argument is that this combination is precisely what our society needs, and I want to suggest that a new look at general education is peculiarly apposite at this time. A societal perspective on general education enables us to put an end to a misplaced debate raging in higher education.

It will first be necessary to clarify certain background considerations that shape both the prospect and agenda for my argument. Without an understanding of these considerations, we will tend to continue the misplaced debate and argue that our society really needs—and needs to support—precisely what we have been taught to provide. Unfortunately, my position must be that very few faculty are currently skilled to offer, and

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that no curriculum in higher education currently demands, sufficient and appropriate general education courses that fit our societal need for liberally educated technical-professionals.

Implementing this proposal will require both professional development efforts by faculty and curricular restructuring in academic requirements if we are to avoid a bastardizing of liberal studies or a dimunition of the skills of professional-technical graduates. To minimize the danger of submitting to either or both of these perils, plans to implement the position adumbrated here should be taken step-by-step on a carefully planned basis.

The background considerations essential to my proposal can be limited to three interrelated components of higher education: 1) who we are as faculty and what it is that we have been taught to understand about our proper professional role, 2) certain changes in our social system that call into question whether we should continue to teach simply what we have learned to teach, and finally 3) an analysis of students merely as a way of clarifying their expectations of a university education.

I. FACULTY

We faculty were once good students. Indeed, we were rewarded for being good students and some of our teachers encouraged us to become graduate students with the expectations that we, like them, could one day be professors. We were both threatened and thrilled at the prospect of being called into a vocation where we would be colleagues of our mentors; thus we took our mentors who recommended us for admission to graduate study as our initial role-models. In the process of graduate studies, we were exposed to additional role-models who reinforced and redirected our initial understanding of our calling. By adaptation, persistence, luck, and skill we became good graduate students, and finally, after several years of academic apprenticeship during which time we demonstrated advanced knowledge of and the capacity to conduct research in our chosen fields, we received our degrees and took our first positions.

We became members of the academic profession and colleagues of our mentors. We were distinguished from our mentors, to be sure, because as good graduate students we carved out our own particular areas of specialization and we made contributions to research and knowledge—the narrow specialization defined each of us as worthy of a graduate degree and university employment.

Although the route to employment on many of our professional school faculties is different from the one just sketched, the dynamics are very similar. The good student who has excelled in practice is called as a faculty colleague without necessarily having additional formal schooling. The good student has achieved a distinguished record as a practitioner of the profession and has thereby earned the right to be a faculty colleague, having his or her own special contribution to bring to the new vocation.

By whichever route we have entered, we know that tenure and promotions will depend primarily on how we continue to develop as *specialists* and are able to exhibit that continual development by publications in ref-

ereed forums. I realize that faculty also teach, serve on committees, advise students, participate in professional societies, and engage in public service activities, but we were not taught to do those things in our graduate apprenticeships. And how much do they count unless we are also productive research scholars? Yet if we are productive research scholars, we know that deficiencies in those other activities will tend to be ignored.

If the only function of higher education were research, and the concomitant production of new knowledge, it would be reasonable for faculty to continue to support and sustain the above over-drawn but intentionally sketched salient features of the current faculty role in the American university. Students are incidental, except for the good student who may also turn out to be a research scholar. The community that sustains the university is irrelevant, except as it stands to benefit from the production of knowledge or to gain professional-technical personnel who have received the finest training in a particular skill.

Notice what we are and are not prepared to do well. Our research scholars can train additional research scholars, at both the graduate (professional) and undergraduate (pre-professional) levels. Our technical-professional faculty can train students well in their own areas of technical specialization. In other words, some of us know how to teach pre-professional and professional students in our own areas of specializations and others of us know how to teach students seeking degrees in our programs of study. *Almost none of us is prepared to teach well students who are* not *majoring or taking a graduate-professional or technical-professional degree in our narrow areas.*

Three choices commend themselves to us. The first is to accept things essentially as they are, recognize that we do some things very well and some rather poorly, but see the things we do poorly as the price we have to pay for the opportunity to do some things well. If we were, after examining the alternatives, to determine that we are finally in the business of educating two types of professionals—academic professionals and technical-professionals—and that we really are not bothered by the fact that our academic professionals have a specialized expertness in liberal learning and that our technical-professionals have little knowlege of our appreciation for liberal learning, then it would be reasonable to maintain the status quo, and recognize that serving students we really do not care to teach is the price we must pay for the opportunity to teach those we enjoy teaching, and be thankful that society somehow is willing to support what we are doing. But even if our development offices and public relations offices can market this notion of the university, can we as a faculty rest content with justifying our existence primarily on the grounds that we are only doing what we have been trained to do? Are we not engaged in deception when we argue for a noninstrumental justification of the value of learning for its own sake and yet, simultaneously, advance our own careers, and those of our good students, on quite different grounds?

A second alternative, and one advanced by Carl Kaysen[1], would be rather radical but also more honest. Kaysen proposes that professional education become the center of higher education in a forthright and acknowledged way. Professional students would have the opportunity to

take elective courses out of curiosity and interest, but would not be required to do so. A professional degree would depend solely on what would be required for acceptable expertness in a particular professional vocation. The engineering student would not be required to study history; the law student would be required to write at an acceptable level, but would not be required to obtain an undergraduate degree before studying law. Kaysen's proposal has the merit of requiring a justification for any non-professional requirements that are imposed on students in professional programs. Given what we currently do in the university, could a reasonable justification be given? I have rather serious doubts that it could—but it would take me too far afield to address Kaysen's challenge here.

A third alternative requires a rethinking of general education wherein liberal and technical-professional studies are viewed as interrelated and as mutually essential for the proper goals of university education. There is an appropriate place for liberal studies in technical-professional studies. Engineers, nurses, accountants, etc. need liberal studies, given the nature of their actual vocational prospects. Furthermore, any university degree program that does not prepare students either directly for a vocation or indirectly for entrance into a graduate program or other vocational possibility, has usually failed both its students and society.

We must recognize that work is a dignified part of human life and that *relating liberal studies to work need not demean those studies.* We who are liberal educators devote our own life work to liberal studies; there is no reason to think that others who combine liberal studies with career and work are intent on destroying the humanities.

If we can find the vision to enable us to cease being defensive and protective, I am confident that in rethinking general education we can formulate a new mission for higher education that enables us to reunite culture and work, liberal and professional-technical studies.

II. POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

In moving to part II of this paper, I want to begin our reflections by asking you to think about two words: Accountable and Priority. Now just what does the word "accountable" mean? That bald question doesn't make any sense, you may be thinking. And I would agree. Then what does it mean for "x" to be accountable to "n" for "q"? If I take my Peugeot to a mechanic for a ten thousand mile service check, and then receive a bill for $400.00, it suddenly makes sense for me to hold the mechanic accountable for explaining why that bill is over four times what I have paid previously for a similar service call. I will want both an explanation and a justification for the substantial increase. In other words, I will demand a reasoned account not only of what has been done, e.g., several parts replaced, but for why the parts needed to be replaced.

Accountable is a relational term that specifies that one party has, or is believed to have, an obligation to another party. What that obligation is depends upon the relationship of the parties. Hence we need to understand something about the nature of the parties and the terms of their relationships if we are to understand how one is accountable to the other.

Priority is also a relational term. When rankings are made on proposed academic budgets, some things are placed ahead of others by some

external standard(s). Priorities are formulated or established, and they can be changed. To understand priority rankings, we need to know what is being ranked, who is doing the rankings, by what standards the rankings are accomplished, who has set the standards, and why those particular standards were used.

We frequently find ourselves held accountable for how and why we set a particular priority order on a list of goals or activities; this is so especially when our proposed priorities have a direct bearing on the activities and life prospects of other persons. In that we can be accountable to several different persons or parties for the same priority rankings, we are often in the position of having some parties approve of our particular set of priorities while others disapprove. When this happens, the final priority rankings usually have to emerge as the result of a process of negotiations, assuming all the parties have the power and desire to represent their positions. When the parties affected by priority settings do not have the power and desire to represent their interests or positions, we all know the usual consequences—those who do have the power tend to set priorities that are to their own advantage and propound them as being to everyone's advantage.

We faculty are no exception. We have almost total control over the curricular structures and graduation requirements. We set the priorities, or absence thereof, in our curricula, and we are hardly accountable to anyone other than ourselves for how we carry out this responsibility. We negotiate our differences as best we can, and form the strongest alliances of which we are capable as soon as it appears that our interests are not being achieved through negotiations. We are always hesitant to open the door to major curricular reforms for fear that change will not be in our special interests. Given who we are and what we do, and how we have arrived as specialist faculty, it is inordinately hard for us to think honestly of institutional goals and priorities and the relationship of our institutional goals and priorities to society and its needs. We mainly want society to trust us, fund us, and leave us alone.

Trust is scarce in the post-industrial society we are entering; funding decisions are more and more related to performance objectives. Priorities for allocating new and expanded funding are not being scaled in relation to the trustworthiness of the recipient but to forseeable measurable results related to performance objectives. The aims of education are no longer an interesting subject for philosophical debate; they now must be stated in a way that can be programmed into a computer.

We are in the initial stages of the post-industrial society which Daniel Bell first forecast in 1959, discussed in an unpublished paper in 1962, and finally published his book about in 1973.[2] Exactly mid-way between 1959 and 1973, in 1966, Bell[3] published another book, *The Reforming of General Education*. Eager "to reduce the intellectual provincialism bred by specialization and to demonstrate the philosophical presuppositions and values that underlie all inquiry," (p. 296) Bell proposed a new general education curriculum that included what he called third-tier courses intended to generalize and integrate students' educational experiences. General education was infrequently discussed in the mid-sixties, yet Bell was able to perceive the necessity for the reform of it given the work he

was doing on post-industrial society. He recognized the need to educate, and not simply train, the technical and professional class that would soon be directing the course of events.

We are rapidly entering an era where we as a faculty either must take the time to formulate the broad educational goals for our programs and institutions or else have others formulate them. We cannot run away from the reality of performance objectives, even if we would prefer to do so; nor can we refuse to relate these performance objectives to the needs of our society beyond the university, even if we have not previously had to be concerned about those needs. We are at the dawn of an era where we can no longer expect the luxury of doing what we have been trained to do without reexamining the reasons for what we should be doing. The new technocrats, who are themselves the products of our present educational programs, are going to be using "modeling, simulation, and other tools of system analysis and decision theory" (Bell[2], but in 1976 Foreword at p. xvi) to make our programs more rational and efficient.

But rational in what sense of rationality? And efficient for what aims and goals? We know only too well the answers to these questions. Indeed, we know that rational and efficient become synonyms in that both are understood in an instrumental sense as a means to foster low-cost, high-productivity operations. A simplistic model of rationality drawn from economics becomes the model of rationality. High-cost, low-productivity operations of any type become inherently suspect. A levelling process is endemic to this model in that qualitative factors have no place in this tough-minded approach to human activities. Notions of excellence, integrity, wisdom, human respect, beauty, etc. have no importance when priorities are established by comparative cardinal measurements.

A central goal of general education should be to challenge the adequacy and appropriateness of this one-dimensional model of rationality as *the model* of human knowing. For not only does this model undermine what it is that distinguishes a university from a technical training center, but it undermines the proprium of the human and of human culture. Government is not a business. Education is not a business. Religion is not a business. While informed and efficient management policies are certainly appropriate in government, education, and religion, these policies should serve the respective primary goals of justice, truth, and worship.

Goal displacement is being fostered throughout our institutional life by an imperialistic model of rationality that seductively presents itself as a friend prior to revealing itself to be the tyrant that it really is. Yet to put the problem in this personified form is to fail to realize that we humans give technical, instrumental reason its power when we do not take responsibility for creating alternative methods and standards for establishing priorities and for holding one another accountable. If we as a faculty do not have a sense of the aims of education whereby we can assess and articulate contributions made by various faculty and departments toward meeting those aims, then it stands to reason that student credit hour production will fill that void.

It is the courageous and enlightened academic administrator these days who is able to challenge the market model for allocating educa-

tional budgets; yet if anything should be clear to us, it is that the aims of education cannot be left to the market forces of supply and demand. We abrogate both our authority and responsibility as faculty when we permit educational policy decisions to be set in that way.

Higher education is the gateway to the knowledge and skill credentials essential for joining the technical and professional "knowledge class"[2] which is rapidly becoming the largest segment of our labor force. We faculty are the gatekeepers for entrance into this new class. Indeed, a university education is more important for determining how one can participate in post-industrial society than was a high school diploma for the society just a generation back. While we are all aware of the high growth rate of university education since World War II, both in terms of absolute numbers of students and in terms of relative percentage of the population attending, we have hardly begun to think through the implications of this recently changed relationship of the university to society.

No longer a leavening agent for the social order, our colleges and universities are now the millers. This signals a major shift in institutional function and responsibility. A fresh look at general education is one appropriate way of coming to terms with these changed responsibilities thrust upon higher education by changes in our society. It is still to be determined whether, and if so, how, our technical and professional "knowledge class" will be educated as well as trained. What we do, or fail to do, in strengthening the general education component of our curricula will bear directly on the resolution of this critical issue.

We have frequently thought of knowledge as a form of power, but probably few of us have thought through the implications for our society that are likely to develop if we do not educate as well as train our technical-professionals *and* if we do not provide access to employment skill development to students majoring in liberal learning. The "knowledge power" ruling elite will be skilled but dumb. The "foolish" students who have cultivated wisdom will be underemployed or unemployed. Both as gatekeepers and as millers, we the faculty will have failed to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented us by the changing role of the university. If we are not to fail, we must devise educational programs that combine liberal and professional-technical studies and which educate the whole student.

We must realize that many of our functional divisions in higher education among colleges and departments become educationally disfunctional when they make it difficult or impossible for students to study or faculty to teach in ways that facilitate new ways of blending liberal and professional-technical learning opportunities.

III. STUDENTS

A sobering fact that is difficult for faculty to accept is that few students enter the university primarily because they want an education. Students generally view the university as necessary for something they want to be or do: be an engineer, a teacher, a doctor, a lawyer, a nurse, an artist, a dietician, a computer designer, an anthropologist, etc. They also come to the university because they just don't have anything better they

can do with their time. Some enter because that is what their friends are doing, others because they have tried to get by in life without a university education and found their prospects limited and their lives boring. Some merely attend for the social life. But as diverse as their reasons are, most students do expect their life prospects, and especially their work or career prospects, to be better with a university degree than would be the case without one. This hope and expectation provides a basic motivation for students to attend the university—higher education is an investment in their future life plans. Parents who can afford to do so are usually willing to assist with or cover the costs of higher education for their children because they share their hopes and expectations.

Several contributing factors of late have inclined university students to be more vocation and work oriented: 1) Educational requirements for entry-level employment positions and, where applicable, for promotion considerations, have become much more job specific. This is related partly to affirmative action policies by the government and partly the result of the increasing impact of technical-rational administrative practices. Credentials are more and more a necessary, if not a sufficient, basis for employment. 2) A change in sex-role expectations has accented the career woman in a way that not only gives women students permission to aim at a career, but suggests that the woman who is not doing so is somehow behind the times. 3) A general anxiety about the future, expecially as related to fossil fuel energy supplies, has accented a competitive drive toward being able to take care of oneself in the midst of scarcity. This has led to a kind of hunkering down to prepare for what appears to be a long, hard struggle. One naturally does not want to be without survival skills when one views one's future prospects as perhaps very much dependent upon those skills. Career and vocational orientations are insurance policies for survival in the event of increasing scarcity of jobs and goods. 4) The increasing costs of higher education are forcing many students and/or their families to borrow money. When one thinks about paying back, or helping to pay back, a loan, one naturally thinks about education in relation to future work prospects. 5) Closely related to item four, but yet distinct, is the fact that higher education is now drawing a much higher percentage of our population into its orbit. Universities are drawing students from families of working class backgrounds. These first generation college students view the university, as do their parents, as a means for status improvement. To fulfill their expectations, these students have to obtain better jobs than their parents ever had.

My reason for reviewing these five factors that incline students today to be more vocationally conscious is to obtain some perspective on this broadly observed phenomenon. There is certainly no justification in these reasons for why universities should become glorified vocational training schools; but at the same time, if we do not respond in educationally appropriate ways to the changing needs and desires of our students, we are failing in an important part of our mission.

It is our mission to be educational institutions, whether or not students come to us primarily to be educated. If students come to us seeking a job-related work skill, receive from us both an education and that skill, we

have succeeded in our mission, their needs have been met, and our society has been well served. We are properly concerned as faculty when one of our students receives a Ph.D. and cannot find fitting employment. Few of us can be callous about the disappointments and frustrations that those unemployed or underemployed Ph.D. professionals experience.

While we on the faculty certainly cannot assume responsibilities for economic factors that are beyond our power to control, it nevertheless remains true that we should have the same concern for our undergraduate students that we have for our Ph.D. graduates. We do what we can that is in keeping with academic integrity to prepare our Ph.D. candidates to be in the most favorable situation possible in a highly competitive and scarce job market. How could we structure our non-professional-technical undergraduate majors and programs if we cared equally about the life prospects of the terminal degree undergraduate student? Do we really want to discourage these students from taking a course of study that includes a work-related skill development? Even the most ivory tower liberal scholar should ponder the answer to this question for a long time before answering with an emphatic no. Even as millers, we liberal scholars do indeed need to keep alive the vision that humankind does not live by bread alone—but not at the expense of producing anorexic alumni whose loss of appetite for work is rooted in the loss of self esteem that results from lacking the necessary skills for making bread.

Meaningful work and self respect are not unrelated in our society. Robert Coles[4] reports certain comments of an unemployed youth, "The worst time is when I'm looking at myself and I feel lousy, so lousy I want to smash the window. If I had a job, I wouldn't be standing there, staring at myself in the first place! Who wants to have that kind of time on his hands? I hate myself; then I hate everyone else. I guess I wish I'd been one of those brainy ones who got a scholarship to college. But college graduates are having their troubles, too. It's a rotten deal when you can't find a job and don't earn your own money. Who wants to draw unemployment money, then borrow from the parents? I feel myself getting younger by the day—becoming a kid, feeling sorry for myself and getting lazier by the minute. No good—after a while you're ready to return to elementary school!" (P. 38.) The youth is imparting wisdom that we faculty ignore at our peril. Many of our graduates "are having their troubles, too," and their struggles with *self-respect* are not that different from what this youth is reporting.

IV. RETHINKING GENERAL EDUCATION

Where do we go from here? How do we develop educational programs in our universities that respond to the current need for liberally educated technical-professionals and employable liberal studies majors? We cannot do so unless we as academic professionals move beyond the current misplaced debate about technical-professional studies and liberal studies. A fresh look at the agenda for general education is apposite for this task.

General education refers to everything in a curriculum that is not part of the major or free electives. I shall not at this point argue for what per-

centage of a curriculum general education should have. That percentage depends on what we are willing and able to do with our general education programs—but if we as a faculty cannot offer the quality and extent of general education desirable, given the percentage of a curriculum currently available for this task, we should not hesitate to either extend the hours required for graduation from certain programs or reduce the number of hours required or possible in a major concentration or in the area of free electives. General education is too important a part of our mission not to make its own demands on curriculum structures, requirements, and divisions.

In its chapter on "General Education: An Idea in Distress," the Carnegie Foundation[5] suggests that we recognize three different components of general education: 1) advanced learning skills, 2) distribution requirements, and 3) integrated learning experiences. The emphasis of the Carnegie agenda for general education is on items one and three above, and it cautions with respect to two: "A little bit of distribution, well planned and presented, is a good and useful thing, but a lot of it left to chance and whim is useless or worse." (P. 172.) The chapter draws to a conclusion with an observation that, "If colleges cannot define what they intend to accomplish in general education, cannot specifically describe how it will benefit the students who engage in it, and cannot deliver an effective general education component, they should seriously consider eliminating it entirely." (Pp. 184-185.)

The justification of liberal learning is one thing. The justification of the benefit of liberal learning for a particular student is an entirely different matter. The public good is served by our having centers of liberal learning that produce educated and cultured citizens. Whether or not a particular citizen will benefit from a particular form of liberal education is another matter entirely. One may be able to justify liberal learning in the former case but not in the latter—it is important to keep these questions separated. (The issue is similar to one in moral philosophy—it is much easier to justify why there should be a social morality than to justify why an individual should be moral.)

My proposal for more closely relating liberal and technical-professional studies in a coherent general education program is grounded in a vision of the public good. Our technical-professional experts are gaining too much social power for it to be in the public good to have uneducated persons exercising such power; and our liberal non-professional majors are graduating from the university without the necessary job related skills to make a contribution to the public good in keeping with their talents and merit. We need to restructure our general education programs to minimize these two deficiencies. At the theoretical level, the solution is not that difficult. At the pragmatic level of implementation, it may be difficult indeed.

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